

VARIETIES OF PRACTICE

By Rebecca Dixon

June 4, 2023

CONCENTRATION, METTA, VIPASSANA, DAILY LIFE PRACTICE, CONTEMPLATION

Practice elements:

- 1) Set intention for your sitting
- 2) Posture: Bones hold you up so you're comfortable, maximize stillness
- 3) Choose object: difficult one for concentration, easier for other practices. Some options:
 - a. Breath (somatic) – some aspect of it – belly, chest, air entry
I focus on airways (trachea & bronchial tubes)
Nostrils usually most difficult
 - b. Posture – is body still? Keep checking how it's arranged now
 - c. Metta phrases
 - d. Images (icons, candle flame) start with familiar, counting (Zen to 10 breaths)

CONCENTRATION: foundation for all practices

Attitude:

- 1) Tranquil & alert – Barre, MA. Practice = doing progressively *less*. Letting go, with *ease*
- 2) With kindness & compassion toward yourself. Accept whatever happens & go on
- 3) Don't just use effort – causes tension, blocks tranquility & pleasure (which helps keep focus)
- 4) Also use interest – examples: watching for thoughts; how *this* breath feels?
- 5) Pleasure (part of concentration) – be alert for it, appreciate it, let it help hold attention

Steps in Concentrating:

- 1) Directing attention to chosen object : “sit” like training puppy – go to object
- 2) Holding it there: telling your puppy mind to “stay” – on chosen object
- 3) There *will be* a “surf zone” – unbalanced by waves of thoughts, can't know for how long
Expect to keep doing “sit & stay” for a while, like rush hour – patience: relax about it
- 4) Tranquility & Pleasure – arise when “stay” lasts a while; can't rush it, just welcome them
- 5) When concentration falters, don't quit; continue or transition to another practice

METTA: Cultivating Lovingkindness

- 1) As your object of *concentration*: focus on phrases
 - a. repetition of phrases – pick 'em & stick with 'em
 - b. Holding mind on phrases concentrates mind & inclines it toward goodwill.
 - c. Feelings may arise. Enjoy positive, just accept negative ones. Back to phrases.

- 2) To *cultivate lovingkindness*: spend time with kind thoughts & feelings
 - a. Same repetition of phrases, more space for feelings to arise (don't force them)
 - b. Focus on words and: benefactor, neutral person, friend, self, difficult person (not Hitler)
 - c. Or someone you wish was happier than they seem; focus on how wish feels
 - d. Sometimes feelings are not loving, kind, compassionate, etc. Just allow them to arise without thinking them over and return to phrases.

VIPASSANA: Mindfulness/Insight Meditation

- 1) Once 'sit' & 'stay' fairly steady, broaden focus to both *object of concentration* & mental phenomena (just *notice* thoughts/feelings arise & let them pass. If difficult, focus elsewhere like on metta.)
- 2) Avoid talking to yourself/figuring things out
- 3) If you notice physical *sensations* arise with thoughts,
 - a. turn full attention to those sensations until they fade,
 - b. then turn back to your object of concentration & then widen focus again
- 4) Always avoid getting pulled into *stories*
- 5) Keep repeating: sit/stay, broaden focus, concentrate on feelings, sit/stay & repeat

DAILY LIFE PRACTICE: returning to or maintaining mindfulness as you go about your day

CONTEMPLATION: light middle ground between one-pointedness & discursive thinking

NOTE: *Insight* (epiphany or "aha!") may arise during any of these forms of practice. Don't try for it, or analyze it, just notice it & keep practicing. It's good to celebrate it & know it's from your practice, even if it arises when you're not practicing